



November 28, 2018

Mark Zuckerberg, Founder, Chairman, and Chief Executive Officer
Sheryl Sandberg, Chief Operating Officer
Facebook
1601 Willow Road
Menlo Park, California 94025

Dear Mr. Zuckerberg and Ms. Sandberg,

We write on behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a coalition of more than 200 national organizations committed to promoting and protecting the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States, and Color Of Change, the nation's largest online racial justice organization, representing 1.4M members. Together we urge you to take immediate steps to build public faith in Facebook—faith that is further eroded every day as we learn more about how the company has undermined our democracy and civil society.

As a company whose public mission is to “give people the power to build community and bring the world closer together,” Facebook has a responsibility to ensure that the platform is not used to drive bigotry and stoke racial or religious resentment and violence. But for years, Facebook's refusal to acknowledge and/or chronic mismanagement of civil and human rights violations occurring on the platform have raised many questions about Facebook—primarily, whether you are willing or able to fix the toxic online environment that you have allowed to flourish.

The harms that we and other civil rights organizations have documented include:

- Persistent predatory and discriminatory advertising, particularly in the areas of housing, employment, finance, and marketing to children.
- Insufficient protections and interventions for people of color and women being targeted, doxxed, and harassed by white supremacists and misogynists.
- Opaque policies on the purposes for which information is given to law enforcement or sold to third-party data mining and brokerage companies.
- Racially charged and targeted digital voter ads and posts intended to intimidate and suppress voter participation among communities of color and to foment racial hostility.
- Rampant misinformation, often in the form of coordinated campaigns, used to undermine political and social advances made by marginalized groups.
- Leaked censorship guidelines that name white men as a group protected from hate speech but not Black children.
- An internal culture with [a documented history](#) of devaluing Black users and employees, and therefore unable to attract and retain Black and Latinx talent, particularly in senior executive positions, engineering and tech departments.
- An absence of credible anti-bias training and civil rights education for staff
- A failure to guarantee that your product teams are not building platform architecture that results in structural biases, and that they are taking all measures to assure that



- technologies such as artificial intelligence, algorithms, machine learning, and facial recognition are not perpetuating inequality, social stereotypes, and discrimination.
- A failure to ensure that you are consulting with diverse institutions, individuals, and groups when engaged in data sharing.

When investigating internal challenges around policy and practices, operationalization of policies, or employee culture, it is all but impossible to get to the root of those issues and set a credible course for change without seeking outside counsel. This is why we, along with many of our colleagues, called for an extensive, independent, and public third-party audit. While we know the audit itself is not a magic bullet, the purpose of the audit remains important—namely, to develop an assessment of the harms outlined above, and advance long-term solutions needed for Facebook to embody its publicly stated values.

When Facebook announced to our groups plans to undertake a civil rights audit, we viewed it as a sign that you were finally ready to both acknowledge and work to undo the well-documented harms that exist on its platform and within the company. We were pleased that you brought on Laura Murphy and Relman, Dane & Colfax as outside counsel to work with our collective groups. But to our dismay, the announcement of the civil rights audit was coupled with an announcement of a review of allegations of anti-conservative bias, as though one was needed to balance out the other when in fact, civil rights is and should be non-partisan.

You have put your enormous corporate thumb on the scale in attempting to make civil rights a partisan issue, when, in fact, civil rights is, and should be non-partisan. Supporting civil rights means respecting the fundamental dignity and equality of everyone. Instead of articulating that view as a core value of your company when you announced the civil rights audit, Facebook has instead positioned itself as equally friendly to those who advocate for civil rights and to those whose political agenda is to undermine those very same rights. Facebook appointed former Senator Jon Kyl to lead the anti-conservative bias review and ignored the fact that he has made incendiary and discriminatory remarks against Muslims, voted for a constitutional amendment to ban same sex marriage, and has had a deplorable record on civil rights and liberties. While the strategy of announcing the audit at the same time may have been the politically expedient thing to do, it is also morally bankrupt.

Our worst fears about this false dichotomy that you have implemented were realized when, after finally acknowledging massive voter suppression efforts on Facebook, you paired voter suppression trainings for employees with a training on so-called voter fraud—a false conspiracy theory that has been used to justify barriers to voters of color.

And now, the recent *New York Times* report tells of how you chose to work in the shadows (and with unscrupulous partners) to undermine your critics, foment anti-Semitism validate right-wing conspiracy theories, and create false equivalencies that put deceptive, self-serving complaints from far right factions on equal footing with the fact-based inquiry of the civil and human rights community. Taken together, these actions can only lead us to believe that adverse forces and incentives within the company are undermining the civil rights audit process.



Based on our experience, we know that true accountability requires a commitment at the highest levels. In light of recent developments, we request that you personally provide us and the public with an update on the status of the audit, your plans to be transparent about its findings, your expected timeframe for its completion, and your commitment to addressing problems and recommendations that the audit may disclose in a sustained and collaborative way.

We also request the following parameters in order to ensure the audit's success, purpose, and integrity:

- A C-Suite level Chief User Advocate charged with representing users' needs who will work in close consultation with civil rights organizations;
- A public review of practices and mechanisms put in place by Facebook to address civil rights violations and increase public transparency;
- A public report with recommendations and a timeline for implementation shared upon conclusion of the review;
- The creation of a public-facing board committee or task force that is provided with the resources and commitment by leadership at the highest levels necessary to ensure full implementation of the report's recommendations.

You have heard from advocates, regulators, investors, and [even your own employees](#), identifying the problems on your platform. It is time for you to find the solutions. We call on you to act with urgency to provide the above commitments, so that the civil and human rights community can have faith that the audit will result in structural changes that affirm your mission and ensure systemic protections for the communities we represent.

Sincerely,

Rashad Robinson and Vanita Gupta

CC:

Joel Kaplan, Vice President, Global Public Policy, Facebook

Kevin Martin, Interim Head, US Public Policy, Facebook

Facebook Board of Directors

Marc Andreessen, Co-Founder and General Partner, Andreessen Horowitz

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